

Commission on Children and Youth

Annual Report

2019-2020



Montgomery County, Maryland
Commission on Children and Youth

Mission Statement

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County’s children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County’s young people.

Commission Structure

The Commission and its committees meet on the second Wednesday of every month (September to June) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The Youth Advisory/Leadership Committee meets from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. on the same evening. The Commission meetings are open to the public. *Due to the Covid-19 health emergency, the Commission on Children and Youth moved to a virtual meeting platform in May 2020.*

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission typically holds an annual strategic planning retreat in June and selects priority issues for the year. Subcommittees are formed around the selected priorities. Due to the public health emergency, the Commission hosted their virtual planning retreat in September 2020.

In 2019-2020, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- Exploring ways to strengthen relationships between members of the law enforcement community and youth, particularly our youth of color.
- Examining current initiatives to creating diverse schools and not just a diverse school system in Montgomery County Public Schools.

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Letter from the Chair



November 10, 2020

**The Honorable Marc Elrich
Montgomery County Executive**

**The Honorable Sidney Katz, President
Montgomery County Council**

**The Honorable Shebra L. Evans, President
Montgomery County Board of Education**

**Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director
Montgomery County Department of Health
and Human Services**

Residents of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Elrich, Mr. Katz, Ms. Evans, Dr. Crowel and Residents of Montgomery County,

This year, the Commission on Children and Youth was able to complete our work of making recommendations on topics of importance to the County's children and youth, despite the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. We shifted our meetings to virtual and the written work moved to shared document platforms. Even though the Commission's two priority areas, "Creating Diverse Schools" and "Strengthening Relationships Between Law Enforcement and Youth", were chosen in June 2019, they took on increased significance with our nation's reckoning with racial inequities and police violence. Based on the excellent work of the two subcommittees that explored these topics, our findings and recommendations are included in this report.

Our youth commissioners also chose the focus area of pedestrian safety, but due to COVID, were not able to complete a thorough review of the issue or provide recommendations. However, the youth commissioners continued to be extremely invested in the Commission, co-chairing each of the subcommittees, drafting recommendations, and being a driving force in work.

In addition to our regular Commission work, we were able to hold our "Youth Having a Voice" roundtable event at the new Wheaton Community Recreation Center in February 2020. We had a good representative sample of youth from throughout the county, with a slightly smaller turn out than last year, allowing more youth to share their experiences.

Our youth commissioners did an excellent job facilitating the discussions and soliciting input from youth participants on the topics of interactions with police, pedestrian safety, and school diversity.

This was my second and last year as chair. I am confident that our new chair, Renae McPherson, will provide excellent guidance as the Commission tackles the pressing issues affecting the youth of Montgomery County. It has been an honor to work with so many dedicated commissioners, especially our youth commissioners. The Commission is truly committed to addressing the needs of the youth of Montgomery County and appreciates your support in our efforts. Our goal remains to ensure that all our county's children and youth are provided the opportunity to live their best lives. The Commission looks forward to working with you again in the coming year and welcomes your thoughts and input into how we can be most successful.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirsten Andersen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kirsten Andersen
Chair

Membership 2019-2020

The Commission on Children and Youth has 27 membership positions including one representative from Montgomery County Public Schools; one representative from an independent school in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Department of Recreation; and two representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services.

The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents.

Youth Representatives

Itamar Fiorino
Alexander Kern
Ijeoma Okoro

Uma Fox
Victoria Koretsky
Ashley Thommana

Parent Representatives

Shruti Bhatnagar
Luciana Crotti-Espinoza
Stephanie Nesmith
Andrea Shore

Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune
Lynne Harris
Julie Reiley
Pamela Taylor

Private Agency Representatives

Kirsten Andersen
Stephanie Clark
Karen Duffy
Joseph Hooks
Shane' Tate

YMCA Youth & Family Services
Leaders Institute
EveryMind
480 Club LLC
Montgomery County Collaboration
Council for Children, Youth and
Families

Membership 2019-2020

(continued)

Public Agency Representatives

Jeanett Peralta	Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Jerome Jackson	Montgomery County Department of Recreation
Rena McPherson	Montgomery County Public Schools

Commission Staff

Erin Stillwell	Program Manager, Department of Health and Human Services, Commission on Children and Youth
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Recommendations

Strengthening the Youth/Authority Relationship

More than ever the relationship between law enforcement and our youth needs to be prioritized. This past year the “Strengthening the Youth/Authority Relationship” subcommittee of the Commission on Children and Youth has heard from guest speakers and worked to develop a set of recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. The budget and schedule for law enforcement training should accommodate and emphasize specialized and recurrent training geared towards youth in restorative justice practices, de-escalation, addressing hate bias, understanding adolescent development, and understanding the psychological aspect of facing officers in uniform both in and out of schools.
2. We suggest ensuring the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for School Resource Officers (SROs) include a data collection and reporting system, as well as input from parents, school staff, students, and members of law enforcement. Additionally, the MoU should be translated into all languages that MCPS documents are published to avoid communication barriers.
3. SROs should receive some of their training in cooperation with MCPS administration in order to create a clear understanding of the role of an SRO. With a better-defined role, this might prevent individuals from attempting to leverage law enforcement in schools. The county should also implement a method to assess the success of its training.
4. *Be Well 365* is a MCPS campaign and curriculum focused on the physical, social, psychological of students to support their academic, personal and career growth. We recommend adding education for youth regarding interactions with law enforcement to the *Be Well 365* program.
5. A Climate Survey (known as the Learning Environment Survey) is given to MCPS students every year. We recommend adding questions about youth and their experiences with law enforcement to identify areas of improvement and focus.

Recommendations

Creating Diverse Schools

This past year, the “Creating Diverse Schools” subcommittee of the Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) directed its efforts toward the improvement of integration and diversity in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The Commission acknowledges the proven benefits to a diverse learning environment, including better concentration, cultural competency, and creativity.

After months of discussion, research, and youth input from the community, the Commission formulated the following recommendations. These recommendations focus on *analyzing* the achievement gap and its correlation to diversity, *expanding* specialized programs across Montgomery County, and *improving* outreach and communication between schools and families.

Recommendations:

Analyzing the Achievement Gap

- 1) Conduct thorough studies of a sample of middle and high schools throughout the county to assess the correlation between student academic progress (e.g., grades and test scores) and the racial and ethnic complexion of the school.
 - a) Numerous studies have shown that a diverse racial and ethnic school environment fosters a more inclusive, productive, and successful school population. We believe that a county-specific study will not only corroborate this but will help identify which parts of the county and individual schools would most benefit from a more diverse school community.
 - b) Upon completion of the Districtwide Boundary Analysis, MCPS should consider a redrawing of school boundaries accounting for school diversity, overcrowding, and student proximity to schools.

Expanding Specialized Programs

- 2) Increase the number of specialized programs offered in primary and secondary schools, including (but not limited to) magnet programs, vocational programs, and college pathway programs.
 - a) Specialized programs allow students the ability to explore subjects they are passionate about in a supportive environment and collaborate with other motivated students with similar interests. These programs attract students with diverse backgrounds, which can foster an inclusive setting that further enhances productivity and learning.

Recommendations

Creating Diverse Schools (continued)

Improving Outreach and Communication

- 3) Increase communications between MCPS/individual schools and MCPS families about specialized programs and educational opportunities throughout the county, specifically about options that are available for elementary school aged students.
 - a) Oftentimes, communication channels are stronger within certain parts of the county, which leads to less diverse programs. Many students and families are not made aware of the options for specialized programs until after the student begins high school. It is vital that all MCPS families are aware of the options available for special programming so they can make the most thoughtful and informed decision. Newsletters, enhanced multilingual outreach, and school/program fairs are recommended methods for spreading the word about such opportunities.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, as a result of the emergency State closures due to COVID-19, we were forced to pause our work in this area.

Commission Activities

Guest Speaker Highlights

Capt. Sonia Pruitt,
MCPD
January 2020

Elijah Wheeler, MC
Collaboration
Council
January 2020

Commission Activities

Policy Priority
Presentation, HHS
Committee of the
County Council
October 2019

13th Annual Youth
Having a Voice
Roundtable
February 2020

[Guest Speakers](#)

On January 8, 2020, the Commission welcomed Captain Sonia Pruitt, Montgomery County Police Department, Community Engagement, and Mr. Elijah Wheeler, Executive Director, Montgomery County Collaboration Council, as guest speakers. Capt. Pruitt and Mr. Wheeler shared an overview of the MCPD School Resource Officer (SRO) program and MCPS Restorative Justice Program. Capt. Pruitt and Mr. Wheeler also addressed the efforts being made to provide SROs with the necessary training to help facilitate positive working relationships with schools and students.

[Commission Activities](#)

On October 10, 2019 the Commission participated in the County Council HHS Committee roundtable discussion and communicated the top two policy priorities for the 2019-2020 commission year.

[13th Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable](#)

The Commission hosted its 13th Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on February 6, 2020 at the beautifully renovated Wheaton Community Recreation Center. A diverse group of students from area middle and high schools gathered for an evening of open conversations about important issues impacting youth today. The roundtable discussions were guided by the following topics of interest: 1) creating truly diverse schools in Montgomery County, 2) improving relationships between youth and law enforcement and 3) finding ways to improve pedestrian safety to keep our youth safe on Montgomery County streets. The youth commissioners organized the event and facilitated the roundtable discussions. The youth participants were encouraged to be honest and their responses were thoughtful, informative and showed a unique insight into many of the issues. Their candid answers provided adults in the room a window into youth experiences in Montgomery County.

[34th Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards](#)

Due to the health emergency caused by Covid-19, the Commission on Children and Youth had to postpone the 34th Annual Dr. Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service scheduled for May 21, 2020.

Policy Priorities for the Commission on Children and Youth 2020-2021

Priority 1: Strengthening Youth and Law Enforcement Relationships

As a result of the recent concerns regarding the poor interactions between secondary school-aged students of color and the School Resource Officer (SRO), the Commission on Children and Youth seeks to analyze and review the major components and effectiveness of the SRO training program. The Commission intends to use this data to make recommendations on how to inform the development of new structures that enhance the safety and learning of ALL students; eliminate mistreatment of students on the basis of race, disability, and/or sexual orientation and gender identity; and strengthen the relationship between the SRO and the entire school community.

Priority 2: Coordinated Services for Children and Youth

The Commission on Children and Youth seeks to create a public initiative that would ensure the existence and awareness of equitable, inclusive, accessible and supportive infrastructures across all County agencies and institutions. Our aim is that this initiative would help to create a stand-alone coordinating entity that allows for a centralized information platform with accessible directories of resources and supports for children and youth of Montgomery County.

Marc Elrich, County Executive
Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director of Health and Human Services
JoAnn Barnes, Chief, Children Youth and Family Services



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Children, Youth and Families Services
Commission on Children and Youth
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For more information about the Commission on Children and Youth, please visit:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ccy

*Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.*

Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission/access to its programs and services.